

Johne's disease

Paratuberculosis or Johne's disease affects cattle, sheep, goats and certain wild animal species. The disease is of long duration and may cause diarrhoea and loss of mass in older (from 2 years on) animals. The diarrhoea cannot be treated.

- Young animals are more susceptible and usually become infected after taking in food or water contaminated with the faeces of infected animals.
- Repeated exposure is necessary before the organisms can establish themselves in the intestinal tract.
- Most of the infected animals continue to shed bacteria intermittently in their faeces throughout their lifetime.
- The disease usually spreads slowly in an infected herd.
- Most animals do not show symptoms and it may be years before the disease is eventually diagnosed in a herd (subclinical infection).

Clinical symptoms

The time before the disease becomes apparent in a herd varies from less than 6 months to several years (even 15 years). A very small percentage of the animals show clinical signs. Affected animals develop a diarrhoea of long duration and lose condition (emaciation).

Differential diagnosis

Johne's disease should not be confused with other conditions which also cause a loss of condition, including worm infestation, coccidiosis or malnutrition. In cattle the disease can be confused with chronic fascioliasis and paramphistomiasis.



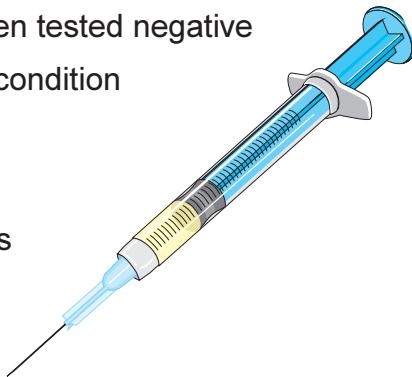
Control

Paratuberculosis is difficult to control because:

- a long period may pass before the disease becomes apparent in a herd
- there are no clinical signs in the early stages of the disease
- it is difficult to make a diagnosis in a live animal
- affected animals cannot be treated successfully.

Control of Johne's disease in a flock is based on the following procedures:

- the elimination of infected animals (emaciated animals) by slaughtering
- strict hygiene to prevent the spread of the infection (especially feed and water troughs)
- only buy animals from farms which have been tested negative
- ensure that boundary fences are in a good condition
- stud flocks must be tested
- try to keep the flock as young as possible
- lambing should take place on clean pastures
- vaccination may in some cases be of value.



Remember the following

- Ruminants should not be kept on the farm or premises for at least 2 years before restocking takes place.
- All cases of loss of condition (emaciation) and diarrhoea should be investigated.
- Contact your nearest state veterinarian for further information.

*Compiled by the National Department of Agriculture, the Directorate Animal Health
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